1: Garnett B-4, 5 (ca. 1880) 1891
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CHAPTER III.

KÛRDISH WOMEN: THEIR BELIEFS.

As Moslem beliefs generally will be described in relation to the Osmanli women, I shall not here discuss them, but merely remark that the Kûrds have the reputation of being very indifferent followers of the Prophet. It is, indeed, a common saying that "A saint cannot come out of Kûrdistan." They are careless and irregular in the performance of their devotions, and not at all inclined to keep the sacred fast of *Ramazan* so conscientiously as do their Osmanli neighbours. They object, for instance, to abstain from smoking between sunrise and sunset, and will indulge in a *narghileh* at noonday. "The Prophet did not forbid tobacco," they argue; "how could he forbid a thing he had never heard of? Besides, what is smoke?—nothing, or next to nothing." The Turks do not, however, interfere in their religious affairs. Their mosques are served by *imâms* of their own race, Kûrdish Mollahs expound to them the Moslem law, and their children are taught by Kûrdish schoolmasters. But, notwithstanding this fact, the theologians are, as a class, owing to their reputation for rapacity and greed, highly unpopular among their brother Kûrds. To the latter they are,

1: Garnett B-4, 5 (ca. 1880) 1891
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indeed, an unfailing object of satire, and their shortcomings in this respect especially form the subject of endless humorous stories, of which the following may serve as specimens:

The Greedy Mollah.[1]

Once upon a time a Mollah and two uneducated persons were travelling together, when they came to a river. All undressed to swim across, the Mollah going first. As soon as they were in the water, the Mollah perceived four small jars, filled with butter, floating at a little distance. He reached the first and held it with his teeth, stretched out his right hand to seize another, and caught the third in his left, so that he succeeded in getting hold of three jars for himself. There remained but one, which was taken by his companions. But not content with three-fourths of the spoil, he called out to the others, "I swear by Allah that I will have my share in that jar too!"[2]

The Mollah taken at his Word.

They say that there was once in Kûrdistan a Mollah named Bazid, who greatly edified the Kûrds by his sermons and counsels. One day when he was preaching in the mosque, he said in his sermon, "O, Musulman people, each of you who possesses two garments ought, for the love of Allah, to give one of them to the poor; each of you who has two loaves ought, if

[1] Jaba, *Recueil de Notices et Récits Kourdes*, p. 18.

[2] This story has given rise to the Kûrdish proverb, "He has seized three jars, and is not content, but would have the fourth."

[3] Jaba, *Recueil, &c.*, p. 16.

of persons in a series of exchanges. There is neither bank nor money-changer in the town, and the funds of a merchant are in interesting safekeeping, either locked up in a chest or buried in the floor in his house, the latter practice being quite common. For everyday purposes the merchant keeps only a little cash on hand, usually a few or two in change in a tin cigarette-box or a drawer. A number of the older men are illiterate, and the difficulties of keeping accounts give them great trouble. Several years ago the teachers offered the townspeople some courses along these lines at night, and were very surprised at their popularity. The greybeards learning their arithmetic is still considered a grand joke. Usually the illiterate merchants seek the help of some friend to prepare their lists and to work out more complicated sums, and many place high expectation in the help of their sons at school.

Before describing in greater detail the rules of the merchants and craftsmen of the town, it is convenient here to provide a list of persons according to their occupations. It will readily be seen that a number of these are not engaged in commerce or craft, and still others employed only in the service of those residing in the town. It is appropriate, however, to present a complete grouping, inasmuch as these are the occupations of the townspeople, save only those who are wealthy enough to neglect work, the mullas or religious leaders, those

of which he did not use and the other confided to a tailor to press and "clean." The rapid shrinkage of the pair in use soon revealed the technique of the tailor's wife, scrubbing them with the other clothes. Pressing is little required by the townspeople, and the tailors, with their fire-heated irons, carry out this task. 296

There are three barbers with shops in the bazar, and one of them, Hajji Mustafa, darvish and town extrovert, will require later attention. The barber's shop is typically a booth, equipped with a few benches like those of the chaykhanas for clients in waiting and a plain wooden chair on which the customer is shaved or tonsured. That of Hajji Mustafa is gaudily decorated with a portrait of the founder of his order, Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, photographs of actresses selected from Egyptian periodicals, and some other scraps of paper and notices. In addition, Hajji Mustafa's shop boasts a wooden board on which someone has painted "Modern Barber Shop" in Arabic, of interest not only because the "Modern" is a town joke, but because it is one of the few establishments in the bazar graced with a sign. The barber's tools, stored in a metal case, include hand-clippers, scissors, combs, a straight razor, some bits of soap, a mirror, and a bottle of cologne, all obtained through the general merchants. Often the barber is called to the home of a wealthier client, and this kit accompanies him. The barber's occupation is unprofitable, inasmuch as most persons shave themselves and hair-cutting 305 [532] [522]

There is no electricity in Rowandux, although it is connected with telegraph and telephone wires, and lighting is by fuel, gasoline, kerosene, or oil. After nightfall the streets are completely dark, save for a few shops or chaykhanas open late and a rare door-lantern burning for visitors, and it is customary for those walking at night to be preceded by a servant with a lantern, or to carry a light themselves.

Water is derived from a spring above the town, that which turns the mill Asbi Shaykhi, and flows down through the streets in small channels and pipes, frequently bridged or covered with flagstones. British engineers laid pipes connecting a series of three iron pumps to better utilize this water, but the pumps have long ceased to flow and are jokingly attributed by the better educated, such as the teachers, to Harun al-Rashid, the Abbasid caliph to whom a great number of ruined bridges and fortresses are referred by the villagers. In shallow ditches the water follows several routes through the town, sometimes in the open and sometimes through pipes, those of the British and a few segments laid by the townspeople themselves. Most of the larger houses have an interior tank or basin, and pipes, closed during most of the day, lead in from the ditches to these. The Kurds of this area, unlike some of their contemporaries in the Middle East, have definite ideas on what constitutes "clean" water, that which is cold and clear, although they may have no appreciation of its relative purity. Rashid Agha of Jindian, whose father's

peasant, by dint of education and enterprise, may rise to the highest ministry in the state. However, those families already in the upper classes, through wealth and influence, tend to retain their hold. As far as intermarriage is concerned, mates are sought who are equal to or higher in status than the person in question. It has been said that there is only one definite cleavage, but there is also a very fine sense of equality in terms of relative wealth and rank. It is possible for a man of the upper class of this system to marry into the hereditary aristocracy, and for a chieftain to take a wife from among the daughters of some official or officer, but, insofar as the aristocratic rank is patrilineal, there is no danger to the proud lineages in question. On the whole, there seems to be far less stringency in matters of marriage in this system than in the first. A successful lawyer, for example, a peasant by birth, might marry the daughter of a minister, but the daughter of a chieftain can never wed a successful peasant.

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It would be incorrect to assign the Muslim clergy, the mullas of the Sunnites and the imams of the Shiites, to any particular horizon in the two systems, for they are to be found in almost all classes of society. They are literate, of course, inasmuch as it is necessary to be able to read the Quran, but there is some suspicion that a few have acquired chapter and verse by ear alone, without fully understanding the art of reading. An amusing

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story, widespread in the Middle East, tells of one such illiterate approached by a peasant woman with a letter, apparently bringing news of her husband on the pilgrimage to Mecca. "Should I rejoice or weep?" she anxiously inquired of the mulla who was studying the document intently. "Weep," he answered after a short time, and the woman tore her garments and went into mourning, assuming her spouse to have died in the course of his pious errand. Actually, however, the letter announced the safe arrival of the man in question, a message ordinarily causing the greatest rejoicing and the preparation of a feast of welcome. When the pilgrim returned, he was dismayed to find his house closed in mourning, and asked the neighbors who gathered in great excitement about him the identity of the deceased. "God is greatest! you are dead, Hajji," they replied. The matter was speedily explained by discussion, and the whole party sought of the mulla some reason for his peculiar position. "If I told the wife to rejoice," returned the latter, "in the arrogance of her demonstrations of joy she might have tempted the Lord to destroy her husband," and all were satisfied with these words. There are both poor and wealthy mullas, and they are able to marry according to their status in this sense. The darwish, as a religious mendicant, is always a man of the lowest class, but, as one learned in esoteric lore, even persons of the highest status are initiated into the mysteries of the darwish orders. In Rowandus one could find a darwish in a demented

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in contrast to the government, treating such affairs more as sport rather than anything else. Sayyid Ahmad subsequently recounted with some pleasure his experiences in exile, for he did not speak Arabic at the time. He heard the official in charge of him, for example, called "stupid" behind his back by subordinates, and concluded that this was his name, always addressing the unfortunate officer as "Stupid Beg" until he was finally corrected. In order to designate the type of meat he desired for his meals, he was forced to resort to imitations of the animals in question, and thought his own picture, that of a Kurdish aristocrat, a son of the great Shaykh Taha, flapping his arms and crowing to a bewildered Arab orderly, most amusing. 622 648 [522]

Toward the townspeople, the chieftains are much more friendly, calling them by name and spending long hours talking with those of higher status, such as wealthy merchants. They are not fond of either the chaykhana or the mosque, although one occasionally finds them there. Insofar as they do not marry within their own families, they prefer the daughters of the wealthy merchants and landowners of the town, for these are supposed to be more "refined," and hence to have greater prestige, than any village maiden. The daughter of Ra'uf Effendi, for example, is married to an aristocrat from elsewhere in the district, Agha Rashid Agha (the first agha here used as a proper name). Among themselves, there is extensive community of interest and 622 565 [582] 565 622 572

in terms of the three questions just noted above. While in principle a man must marry in his own or a higher status, defined by employment and wealth, there is a constant struggle on the part of parents to arrange marriages for their offspring which will be socially advantageous. This mobility, which has a moderate degree of realization, does not exist for the opposite ends of the spectrum, for example, the sons and daughters of a wealthy merchant would never wed those of a servant, but is rather to be found among those who neighbor each other in quality. The same things are true of masculine friendship, such as calling at an acquaintance's house. In America the officials of a company may visit each other and in other ways express their friendship, but an executive does not normally seek out intimates among his workmen or pay visits to their homes, just as in Rowanduz friends are to be found among those of comparable status. This is clearly indicated by jesting. A man can always have a joke at the expense of an inferior, but never the reverse. "Anwar, you do business like a child," a merchant said to one below him at a gathering in a chaykhana, evoking general laughter. The person in question could only shake his head, laughing at himself, and, of course, immediately sought out someone to taunt in return nearer his own status. On the other hand, as has been seen, servants, particularly those from the village where almost all belong to the same social stratum, think of themselves as members of the family, and regularly

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girls exhibit shyness and what may be described as willfulness in their behavior. "If the young man is a guest at her house and asks her for a glass of water, she may refuse him and the other people will laugh." Both boy and girl are embarrassed by a certain amount of joking by their elders and companions, and chafing a young man about his coming wedding is a common form of amusement. During this period, the girl's father is expected to have doubled the sum of the muqqadan from his own resources, and it is expended on the clothing, household needs, and jewelry of the prospective bride. Both houses are scenes of intense activity in preparation for the wedding. 584 [522] [583]

When a day has been selected for the wedding celebration, one of the elder men of the youth's family makes a tour of the town, inviting relatives and friends of his household. A similar invitation is issued by the father and brothers of the maiden. Those invited send many gifts of food to the two houses. On the forenoon of the wedding, the mother and sisters of the bride bathe and dress her carefully, rebraiding her hair and staining her hands with henna. Members of her family take presents of henna to the townspeople with which the recipients paint their fingers. One can always recognize a wedding-guest for some weeks afterward by such marks. At the two houses, those of the bridegroom and the bride, parties of guests assemble, and refreshments and banquets are given throughout the day, the brother or most intimate friend of the youth receiving the 585 [302]